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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 7545
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA 0524
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHC/DEPT OF INTERIOR WASHINGTON DC
RHMCSUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFIUU/HQ EPA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY 1058
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 7523

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SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR SECC and OES: DNelson,RKastenberg,KLarsen
COMMERCE FOR NOAA
USDA FOR FAS
STATE PASS TO USAID

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SUBJECT: THAILAND SUPPORTS COPENHAGEN ACCORD BUT LAGS IN
ASSOCIATING

REF: A) State 3079 (B) 09 State 132367 (C) 09 Bangkok 3034

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: ESTHoff discussed COP15 with Thailand's lead climate change negotiator on January 13; Ref A demarche was delivered to Minister of Environment on January 14. Both viewed the Copenhagen Accord positively. The PM will chair an interagency meeting on January 21 to start the decision-making process for association. It is unlikely that Thailand will associate by January ¶31. The ongoing public/private process to determine Thailand's emission target and national actions also will likely not be completed by January 31. The complexity of Thailand's economic and political landscape complicates the democratic decision-making by all stakeholders. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) is hampered by lack of uniform metrics among government agencies and the private sector. The RTG requests U.S. technical assistance, rather than funds, to help it establish baselines for emissions. As Thailand continues to play a leadership role in the ASEAN climate change working group, assistance to Thailand would be well placed. Thailand will host an ASEAN Climate Change Working Group meeting some time before January 31 to discuss association with the Accord. Post will continue to urge the RTG to associate by that date. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. On January 13, ESTH officer met with Ms. Areewattana Tummakird, Director, Climate Change Strategies Division, Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE), to continue an ongoing discussion on the Copenhagen Accord. Areewattana was Thailand's lead negotiator at the COP15 in Copenhagen and the previous COP15 preparatory meetings. The Prime Minister has charged Areewattana's office with the policy lead for national and international climate change analysis and action. Both Prime Minister Abhisit and MoNRE Minister Suwit attended COP15. ESTHoff discussed Ref A demarche briefly with MoNRE Minister Suwit on January 14, and with MFA Americas Director Kanchana on January 15.

ASSOCIATION WITH THE COPENHAGEN ACCORD

13. (SBU) Areewattana said that the Prime Minister, MoNRE Minister and she all viewed the Copenhagen Accord as a positive step. However, the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) decision to "associate" or not with the Accord could not be made until the RTG completed a stakeholder decision-making process that included the RTG interagency process, as well as consultation with Thailand's extensive private sector. Since the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen (COP15), Areewattana's office has been analyzing the Thai situation, in the context of the Copenhagen Accord, to inform the interagency process. On January 20, her office will convene a meeting of the RTG's "Climate Change Academic Committee" (which includes policymakers) to discuss COP15, the benefits for Thailand of associating with the Accord, a national emission target number and Thai actions. On January 21 the Prime Minister will convene the RTG's interagency working group on climate change to attempt decisions on these topics. Areewattana does not expect final decisions on any of these points by January 31, but intends to have it all sorted out by the June UNFCCC meeting in Bonn. (Note: ESTHoff will keep in contact with Areewattana to field any questions for her interagency meeting on association, and will meet with her on January 22 to assess results of the interagency meeting, to identify any avenues for helping Thailand to associate by January 31. End Note.)

THAILAND'S EMISSIONS TARGET AND NATIONAL ACTIONS

14. (SBU) At COP15, Areewattana reported that the PM was pushing his negotiating team to come up with an emissions target, and her team had to explain that Thailand was just not ready despite interagency meetings in the weeks leading up to COP15. Areewattana told ESTHoff that Thai officials felt that prior to associating with the Accord, there should be some agreement on Thailand's capacity to reduce emissions. Determining a possible emission target is in turn complicated by the RTG's inability to formulate an accurate inventory of its emissions.

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EMISSIONS TARGETS: THAILAND VS INDONESIA

15. (SBU) At COP15, the PM and others used Indonesia's announcement of an emissions target as a contrast to Thailand's complexity. Areewattana explained the differences with Thailand. Indonesia has relatively little industry that emits greenhouse gases. Most Indonesian emissions are forest -related, with the vast majority of the forests in government hands. Thus on the one hand it is easier to measure emissions from one major source, and on the other with government control it is easier to commit to an emission target. In Thailand, on the other hand, the emissions are from scattered industries, most of which are in the private sector. Like the U.S., Thailand at the moment does not have firm legislation upon which to base an emissions commitment, and even if it did, Thailand's enforcement regime is not sufficiently developed. To this one needs to add a robust environmental civil society which needs to be part of the national dialogue on emissions. Thailand's extensive interagency process and government to private sector consultations are still ongoing and nowhere near ready for a solid decision. Areewattana said that the January 20 and 21 meetings would hopefully serve to make progress on the emissions goal, but in the meantime would at least reassure the interagency team that associating with the Accord was the right step in the short term.

THAILAND'S PROBLEM: NO AGREEMENT ON BASELINE EMISSIONS

16. (SBU) While Thailand's emissions are quantified by various organizations, Areewattana says her office does not have confidence in them, especially as emissions figures by the UN and other organizations are usually based on Thai figures that she knows are suspect. Within Thailand, the relevant ministries, for example, Energy, Industry, and Transportation, do not have uniform protocols for measuring emissions. The RTG has trouble aggregating the disparate reporting and piecemeal reporting mechanisms. Some sectors, such as in forestry and waste management, are not sufficiently quantified. It has become somewhat of an interagency impasse and Areewattana reported this difficulty as an area that the U.S. could provide expert assistance.

THE ASEAN COUNTRIES

17. (SBU) There will be a meeting of the ASEAN working group on Climate Change some time before January 31. On the agenda will be the post-Copenhagen path towards COP16 in Mexico, as well as discussion of associating with the Copenhagen Accord. Also to be discussed are common strategies for accessing Clean Development Mechanism funds. Thailand will be pushing again a common ASEAN position on various climate change matters; this proved impossible at COP15 and will remain difficult since the various countries are so different in their mitigation and adaptation situations. Areewattana predicted that Singapore and Indonesia will associate with the Accord. Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia would basically like to associate but are working through decision-making processes. The ASEAN nations are grouped in different ways. Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Brunei are not big emitters, while Singapore and Indonesia are but for different reasons. As she understood that the Philippines was about to announce an emissions target, Areewattana thought that the Philippines may also associate soon with the Accord.

NEXT STEPS

18. (U) As the Thai interagency group discusses emissions baselines and targets, it will also have to grapple with how to pay for standardizing emissions reporting. Areewattana noted that Thailand had a modest 1997 grant by the UN Global Environmental Facility (GEF) to help with its required national communication under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, but in recent years there has been no foreign assistance to assist with emissions inventories. (Note: Thailand is executing a number of other GEF projects related to clean energy. U.S. EPA assisted Bangkok with air pollution quantification and reduction but that program ended. End Note.)

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While Areewattana asked for U.S. assistance for emission inventories, after some discussion she admitted that Thailand does not need financial assistance so much as technical assistance. The RTG still has some interagency coordination to develop. She noted that the Ministry of Agriculture only began focusing in 2009 on its role in climate change issues. Thailand still has to adequately quantify emissions from crops and livestock methane generation, as well as the forest component. (Note: Thailand is in the process of reforestation after substantial deforestation in the 1980's that led to a 1989 logging ban. The national intent is to establish commercial sustainable logging at the appropriate time. Post will use the visit of U.S. EPA Methane to Markets program officer and Post's Embassy Science Fellow, an agricultural climate change specialist, to give Areewattana's office some direction on agricultural emissions. End Note.)